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THE IRISH FREE STATE

BY P. W. WILSON

IN any attempt to analyze the future of Ireland under her own elected institutions, one has to begin with the discouraging fact that at the Birth of the Nation, as David Wark Griffith would call it, the Mother of Parliaments, so proud of her numerous progeny, has in this instance presented a grateful mankind with twins, both of which restive offspring, the legislatures at Dublin and Belfast, insist at the moment on surviving. The hope that there might have been from the outset of her career as a Dominion an Ireland united in her elected institutions, has not been realized. The Free State has started, but Ulster has not applied for admission, and this action she must take, if at all, within one month. Indeed, in the lively annals of Belfast, no more embittered scenes have been recorded than during the last few weeks. The city is still predominantly Unionist. By this, I mean that it still wants all Ireland to be governed from London in the name of the King. It was only when a Parliament in Dublin became inevitable that Ulster, as a guarantee of exclusion, accepted a Parliament of her own. For her to see Sinn Fein in acknowledged power is a most unwelcome medicine, and in Belfast the rioting has been deplorable and continuous. The Irish Free State or its territory has for years boycotted Ulster. This boycott has accentuated a depression, already sufficiently serious in the shipyards and other industries of Belfast. To the wage-earner of an Orange persuasion, it was intolerable (some would add, intolerant) that, as a result of the boycott, he should be out of a job while Catholics continued at work. Industrial jealousy has thus inflamed the perennial religious animus, and in the street-fighting many lives have been lost. Appeals from the Protestant leaders of Belfast fall too often on deaf ears.

The responsible statesmen of Ireland, whether North or South, realize that two factions cannot, like Jacob and Esau, like Cain

and Abel, pursue an internecine quarrel over the birthright which is the common heritage of both. For North and South Ireland, it is equally ruin. Hence, there has been an immediate meeting between Sir James Craig, the Prime Minister of Ulster, and Mr. Arthur Griffith, the head of the Free State. On Mr. Griffith's side, this conference presented no difficulties. Republicans, far more extreme than he is, have wanted and still want to win Ulster. It is Sir James Craig who has, as it were, unbent; and many influences doubtless have moved him. If he proclaims his loyalty to King George, he must recognize the more fully that of all men King George is the most zealous for appeasement in Ireland. If he invokes British Toryism, he finds that all save a few Die Hards are following the King. If he turns to the Unionists in the Free State, he discovers that no men are more convinced than they that their natural allies in Ulster should be included in the country where perforce they themselves, though in so small a minority, must still live their lives. An Ulster absolutely recalcitrant would be, therefore, an Ulster absolutely isolated. In the United States, in Canada, in Australia, Protestants and Catholics manage somehow to live together as citizens. Why should Belfast be the one exception?

To those who wish to unite Ireland, it is an actual advantage that there should be at this early stage a split in Sinn Fein. The fear of the Protestants has always been that they would be out-voted on every occasion by a solid majority of Catholics. The history of the Nationalist Party, including as it does the controversies over Parnell and the feuds among Messrs. Redmond, Dillon, Healy and William O'Brien did not suggest at any time that the majority was solid except for Home Rule and against the Union with Britain, but to the Orangeman, green has no shades. It is green and there was no green, no yellow, in the Union Jack. But even Ulster must now see that the Irish, whether in the Free State or in English-speaking countries across the ocean, are divided into groups, like every other nation. The devoted followers of Mr. De Valera will either abstain from attending the Parliament in Dublin or, if they attend, will sit, speak and vote in opposition. It is a situation which might give to an Ulster Party a determining voice.

The prospect is the more inviting because the issue on which Sinn Fein is sundered is nothing less than the question whether British sovereignty shall or shall not be retained. On this issue, but one answer can come from Belfast, and that answer must be in favor of Arthur Griffith. The harder he is pressed by Mr. De Valera, the more assured is he of a friendlier hearing in Armagh and County Down. In fact, we are confronted by the curious spectacle of Michael Collins, "the murderer," insisting upon fidelity to King George, and the experience of Ireland repeats that of South Africa, where Smuts and Botha, after fighting the British, have had to contend with the sheer separatism of General Herzog. The same man may resist British rule and accept British citizenship. As the empire is decentralized, so does its sovereignty approximate to self-determination.

Hence it is no wonder that, with Mr. De Valera hasting to an All Irish Convention in Paris, Mr. Griffith should prefer to talk business in Ireland with Sir James Craig. The Sinn Fein leaders have moved apart and their movement is symbolic. They have never meant the same thing. To Mr. Griffith, the Republic was a means to any kind of real autonomy. He knew that of late years Ireland had suffered no oppression worth the name. But he also knew that Great Britain was slow in granting autonomy and was preoccupied. Sinn Fein was thus a gesture. As a gesture of impatience, it became too formidable to be ignored. In shaking a fist at England, Sinn Fein, as led by Mr. Griffith, was in reality driving England out of her dependence on Toryism and Belfast. When that end was secured, Mr. Griffith was shrewd enough at once to conclude the bargain. Having concluded it, his quarrel with England ceased.

Mr. De Valera's idea was never this, at any rate since his visit to the United States. Everywhere he saw a world changing from monarchy to republic. To him, the ideal for Ireland was not Canada and Australia where he would have been arrested promptly as a traitor, but Poland or Czechoslovakia. He saw himself as a miniature Washington, a first President, comrade of Masaryk and Paderewski, the Gandhi or the Sun Yat-Sen of the British Isles. Many States, cities and universities in America had so "recognized" him. For months, he lived in the limelight and, in the end,

he was hypnotized by the camera. He came actually to believe that there was in Ireland a Republic. When he returned, he was asked two questions, what money he had collected and whether there was any hope of intervention by the United States. To these questions, the answer was self-evident. The exchequer was depleted, there was no longer an election in America to be influenced, and all chance of intervention, if there ever were a chance, had vanished. He also found that while Ulster was beleaguered, she was in no mood to haul down her flag, while England, however embarrassed, was not less firm on ultimate sovereignty. Mr. De Valera's intellect had been enslaved by formulas. He could yield everything except a comma. Let there be treaties between England and Ireland, let there be free trade, let there be mutual defense, let there be "Cuba", but do not transform President De Valera, chosen by the will of the people, into the Right Hon. Eamonn De Valera, M. P., Prime Minister. Rather than that, let there be war for thirty years and a war involving the world! It has been urged that Mr. De Valera was the stiff and stern Parnell of the twentieth century. Parnell was assuredly stern and stiff but he dealt with facts, not phrases.

All sovereigns are open to flattery and Mr. De Valera, in his turn, was surrounded by a court. A section of the Catholic Clergy, animated with the feelings toward England which arise from Irish birth, saw in an Irish Republic a new Papal State, firmly established within the English-speaking nations, a Holy Land of the ancient faith, rearing and sending forth missionaries everywhere to convince and to subdue an unbelieving world. For a time, it seemed as if the Republic would be a weapon of such clericalism, but the project failed. In the Vatican there are to-day vast stores of ripe experience. The College of Cardinals contains some but not many Irish princes of the Church. Of those high prelates, there were none, wearing the red hat, who endorsed the crusade as above defined. Cardinal Logue, like Cardinal Gibbons, was openly sceptical of the Republic. Quebec quietly resisted the theorem that Ireland alone voices Catholicism in North America, and in London Cardinal Bourne treated the death of Terence MacSwiney as a case of suicide. A religious-political enterprise which was bound to fail in the end, however

enthusiastically pressed, thus broke down by its own inherent hazards. Sinn Fein in New York tried on St. Patrick's Day to remind people, by placard, of Daniel O'Connell's saying that "We take our religion but not our politics from Rome," and a few months later Mr. De Valera was publicly rebuking Pope Benedict XV who had appealed for peace between England and Ireland. It meant that the Republicans could no longer use the Church as their tool and that the Church did not wish thus to make use of the Republic. Both Church and Republic must each stand on its own footing—the first spiritual, and the second political. The Church stood, the Republic fell, and Mr. De Valera learned that there is no gratitude in ecclesiastical vicissitudes.

Among Mr. De Valera's followers have been multitudes of women, recently enfranchised in Ireland as in the United States. In him, they saw a leader, disinterested, educated, and lifted far above the customary and sordid intrigues of Irish agitation, as hitherto conducted. On both sides of the Atlantic, Mr. De Valera appears to have retained in great measure the romantic loyalty of Irish women. In the coming struggle between him and Mr. Griffith, this may prove to be an important fact. As Michael Collins has discovered, the Countess Markievicz has a terrible tongue. Whatever part may be played by Terence MacSwiney's widow, his sister, Miss Mary MacSwiney, is an irreconcilable of the deepest dye. And so is the widow of Mayor Callaghan of Limerick. The women in Sinn Fein have their own clubs and they seem to stand unanimous among the intellectuals against Mr. Griffith. More powerful than any with Mr. De Valera are Mr. and Mrs. Erskine Childers, themselves English and, like so many English, more Irish in the cause of Ireland than the Irish themselves. Mr. Childers, the kinsman of a famous Conservative statesman, brings to bear on the Irish problem all the craft and method of the English bureaucracy. His wife cannot forgive and cannot forget her country. With her husband, she is responsible, not a little, for Mr. De Valera's attitude. Dublin has accepted the Treaty; but has it been accepted in Cork?

Obviously, it is to the interest of all sane persons to help Mr. Griffith and his Cabinet to overcome the dissentient opinion of the Republicans. Great Britain has therefore released some thousands

of political prisoners, guilty of treason under the former conditions. Much to the surprise, it is said, of Michael Collins himself, she has withdrawn her garrisons, including the "Black-and-Tans", who on departure were found to be not such bad fellows in themselves after all. Moreover, the Bank of Ireland, which represents the country's contact with the London money market, has lent Mr. Griffith a million pounds, as it were to go on with. Finally, we have Lord FitzAlan, the Viceroy, coming in a day or two ahead of time to surrender Dublin Castle to the Irish Free State, while the War Office arouses a touch of regret by evacuating the country of those famous Irish Regiments at mention of which even Sinn Fein glows with pride. All the evidences seem to show that the Free State is a little disconcerted by the Britain that so promptly keeps her word.

As a busy man, Mr. Griffith has acted with much ability and discretion. He has got into immediate touch with Sir James Craig, and although Belfast is obdurate, the boycott has been called off on both sides. This means that Catholics are either to be given their jobs or assisted with out-of-work benefit. Also the difficult question what should be done about Fermanagh and Tyrone—those border counties where Catholics and Protestants are distributed by patchwork—has been settled in an hour by a prospective adjustment of boundaries. And more important, perhaps, than all this is the announcement that the two leaders will work out a plan for establishing an authority of some kind for what I may call All-Ireland affairs. This will mean—whatever form the authority takes—the virtual if not actual inclusion of Ulster in the Irish Free State. In the meantime, it is significant that the threatened strike on Irish railways, which would apply impartially to the two areas, has been discussed in the joint conference, where measures have been taken to meet the crisis. In the task of healing old differences, this must be pronounced a good beginning.

Otherwise, it will seem strange to many of us how little difference to the daily life of the average Irish home the creation of the Free State has made or is likely to make. On the letters, as they arrive in the morning, has been affixed as hitherto a stamp with the King's head. So also is it with the change in one's pocket—

the pennies, shillings, half crowns—and with the ten shilling and other notes. On Saturday night, the old age pensioners are drawing their money, as usual, and the farmers know that their redemption under Land Purchase must be paid, precisely as in the past. Trade with Britain goes on, from day to day, like schools, colleges and other vocations. No flag has to be torn down, for England never forces the individual to fly her flag—at any rate, not in Ireland—where the flag need not be seen unless desired. And inside Dublin Castle—what are the alterations? Mr. Griffith's first order has been to tell the judges and the civil servants and everybody so employed to go on in the immediate future exactly as they had been going on in the immediate past; doing what? Well, if one is to judge from certain literature, oppressing, plundering and slaying the Irish people! In a week, one saw the entire structure of the case against so-called British Administration reduced to its more modest proportions. Dublin Castle is commanded to carry on business as usual.

The fact is, of course, that for a generation or more Ireland has been, in all essentials, governing herself. The idea that relays of British bureaucrats proceeded to the country to rob the poor people of their hard won savings, was untrue. The Civil Service in Ireland is in the main Irish. If Mr. Griffith tried to dismiss the civil servants it would be from Ireland, not England, that he would hear. Also, the entire local government of Ireland—the cities, towns, and counties—has long been elected by the Irish themselves, and the establishment of a Free State will here make no difference except a return to what President Harding calls normalcy.

Probably there will be, under the new *régime*, a stricter Parliamentary control of the officials. Before the War, one Chief Secretary had to answer in the House of Commons for forty departments. In the Free State, these departments will be grouped under half a dozen appropriate Ministers and there will be no cabling to London. This is a direct gain in economic administration. On the other hand, Civil Service regulations in the United Kingdom have been wholesome and thoroughly applied and much will depend on maintaining them in Ireland against the alternative practice of political nomination. The financial adjustment must

take time. Probably we shall see curiously little change in the established British plan of collecting and disbursing revenue. The most interesting struggles may well be over the schools. To what extent will there be an outlay on education and what will be the attitude assumed towards education by the Churches?

With the structure of an organized community thus firmly founded, it can scarcely be supposed possible that Mr. De Valera will be able again to plunge Ireland into civil war. After all, it is now evident that Britain has been much misjudged. There is little, save the name Free State, that Ireland has now obtained, which was not put into her hands seven years ago. She is not independent. She has not gained Ulster in advance of Home Rule. She might just as well have accepted at Buckingham Palace in 1914 what she came to accept in 1921 at Downing Street. No power essential to happiness has been given to Mr. Griffith that would not have been also Mr. Redmond's. As in the case of women's suffrage in Britain, the violence has only delayed what, without violence, had been won. In effect, the "Black-and-Tans" were conquering Ireland for her own liberation.

In order to understand Mr. De Valera's opportunity, we must define what is meant at this moment by the Free State. The Dail Eireann consists of members elected not to an Irish Parliament but to the Imperial Parliament at Westminster. This body has refused the oath of allegiance as administered in London. It elected Mr. De Valera President. It has now deposed him and elected Mr. Griffith. He has therefore the right to govern Ireland for one year, practically as dictator, and even if he lost his majority in the Dail Eireann, he could still continue in power. But within the year he must institute a new election for the first Irish Parliament. Unless he carried the Free State, he would then have to resign and presumably Mr. De Valera would come into office. If Mr. De Valera were then consistent with his present attitude, he would again refuse the oath, declare the Parliament to be the Dail Eireann of the Republic, resume the Presidency, and demand recognition for Ireland as an independent sovereign Power. On the other hand, if Mr. De Valera is beaten at the polls, he and his party will have to decide whether the oath of allegiance, so accepted by the Irish people, is still unacceptable to them. In

France, for instance, royalists swear fealty to the Republic, and in Germany, for many years, republicans swore fealty to the Kaiser.

Ireland will never be other than a delightful and a dramatic country. She cannot expect, however, that she will be, in the future, as prominent as in the past. Grievances are among nations the most assured of all advertisements. Remove the grievances and you lower the footlights. Arthur Griffith is now the John Redmond of the drama and, like Mr. Redmond, he has been both to Downing Street and to prison. Probably he will surprise people most by his caution. And at the moment it is perhaps significant that among the tasks which he has to face is the application of "law and order" to the districts around Cork and the suppression of dissentient "Republicans" who are terrorizing the majority of the people, because of their loyalty to the Free State. That indeed is a situation which invites the Hibernian pen of George Bernard Shaw!

P. W. WILSON.